



First Kings - Chapter Seven

I 1 Kings 1:1-11:43 - The Reign of King Solomon (continues)

I.f 1 Kings 6:1-7:51 - Solomon's Buildings (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Seven

The chapter commences with an account of the building of the palace complex, which included Solomon's own living quarters and those of his Egyptian queen. Attention then returns to the completion of the temple focusing mainly on the detailed work in bronze by Hiram. There is then a summary account of all the items that were made mostly for the altar and of the items that David had dedicated for the temple. Thus the building of the first temple was finally completed.

I.f.iii 1 Kings 7:1-12 - Solomon's Palace and Other Buildings

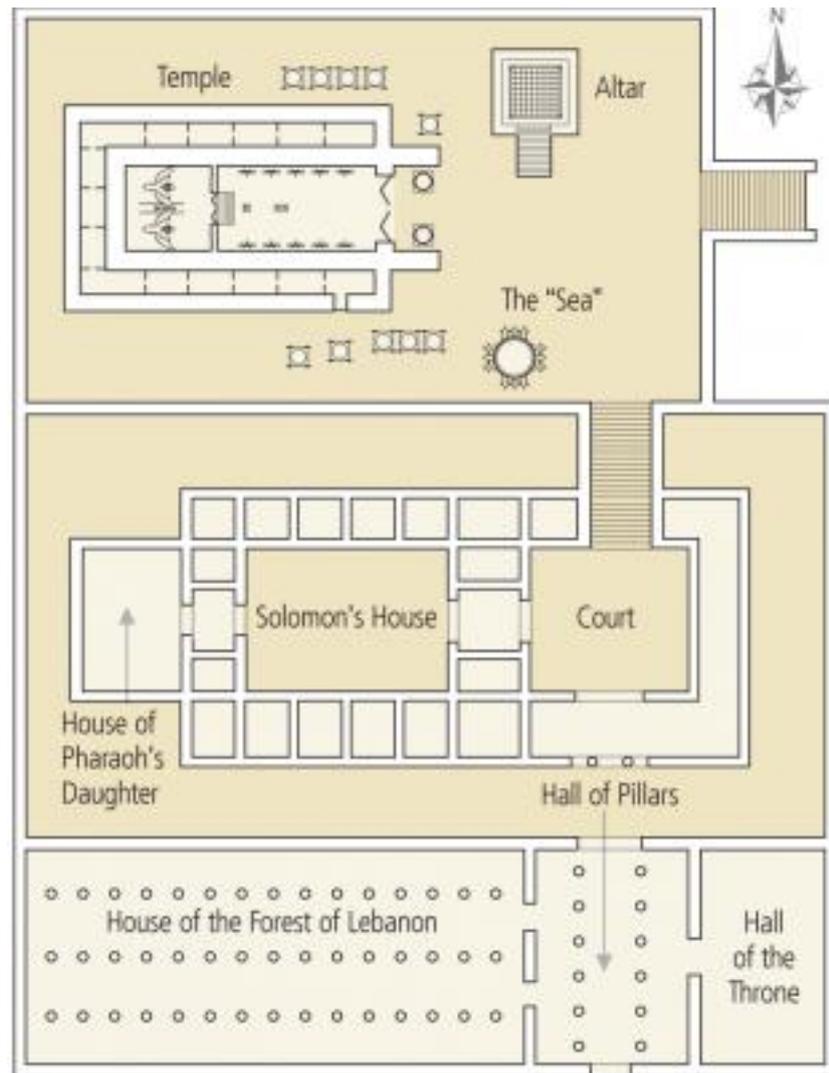
Solomon has a lavish palace built that is intended for royal functions and the passing of judgement when cases were brought before him. He also had his personal living quarters built and a palace for his Egyptian wife. The only evidence for Solomon's palace complex comes from the Bible. It appears to have been built according to the plan of a neo-Hittite palace type called a *bit hilani* in Hebrew. This type of palace has been found in northern Syria at the sites of Tell Ta'yinat and Zinjirli.

¹ Solomon was building his own house for thirteen years, and he finished his entire house.

1 Kings 7:1

Solomon was building his own house for thirteen years, and he finished his entire house. The previous chapter concluded: <<*In the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its*

parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it>> (1 Kings 6:38). The temple was glorious, but it seems that Solomon wanted a house that was even more glorious than the temple. Two ‘houses’ are in view in this chapter, and an emphatic contrast is being made between them. Solomon spent much more time building his own house or palace complex than he did building God’s house, another indication of his divided heart. The temple is not really ‘complete’ until all the work on its interior is complete and it is being worshipped in; and this is not the case until the end of Chapter 8.



Solomon’s Temple and Palace Complex

To get to the new quarter that Solomon built from the old city of David, one had to pass through the gate in the northern Davidic city wall. Going in a northerly direction, the new complex consisted of an entrance hall, the so-called Hall of Pillars (v.6); the House of the Forest of Lebanon (vv.2-5); the porch (v.6b); the king’s house (v.8a); and the house of his wife, Pharaoh’s daughter (v.8b).

The House of the Forest of Lebanon, shown here to the west of the Hall of Pillars, served as an armoury. The main hall had rows of cedar pillars, and gold shields and targets hung on its walls; refer to 1 Kings 10:16-17. To the east of the Hall of Pillars was the porch, or Hall of the Throne, Solomon's place of judgement. Beyond the Hall of Pillars lay Solomon's palace. Here is the setting which so impressed the Queen of Sheba on her state visit to King Solomon; refer to 1 Kings Chapter 10.

There are parallels between this palace complex and the contemporary palaces of northern Syria, with the order of the parts of the building in Chapter 7 corresponding to the order of the units in these palaces.

² He built the House of the Forest of the Lebanon one hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high, built on four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams on the pillars. ³ It was roofed with cedar on the forty-five rafters, fifteen in each row, which were on the pillars. ⁴ There were window frames in the three rows, facing each other in the three rows. ⁵ All the doorways and doorposts had four-sided frames, opposite, facing each other in the three rows.

1 Kings 7:2-5

The House of the Forest of the Lebanon is just the first of the several buildings of the palace complex and was much bigger than the temple; refer to 1 Kings 6:2. The temple had quite a bit of cedar of Lebanon in it; this building, however, had so much cedar that it could be named after the forest from which the cedar came – even though it was apparently designed only as a treasury or armoury: *<<He has taken away the covering of Judah. On that day you looked to the weapons of the House of the Forest, and you saw that there were many breaches in the city of David, and you collected the waters of the lower pool>>* (Isaiah 22:8). This confirms that the king appears to have been much more concerned about his palace than about the Lord's temple.

The forty-five rafters or pillars set in the House of the Forest of Lebanon also gave the impression of being in a majestic forest. First Kings 10:16-17 mentions 500 gold shields that were hung in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. As noted above, Isaiah specifically called this building an armoury in Isaiah 22:8.

⁶ He made the Hall of Pillars fifty cubits long and thirty cubits wide. There was a porch in front with pillars, and a canopy in front of them.

⁷ He made the Hall of the Throne where he was to pronounce judgement, the Hall of Justice, covered with cedar from floor to floor.

⁸ His own house where he would reside, in the other court behind the

hall, was of the same construction. Solomon also made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken in marriage.

1 Kings 7:6-8

The Hall of Pillars. The remaining buildings that formed part of the complex are described. Besides the Hall of Pillars, which was almost as large as the temple, there 'the Hall of the Throne', also called the Hall of Judgement or Justice: <<*For there the thrones for judgement were set up, the thrones of the house of David*>> (Psalm 122:5), and two palaces, one for Solomon and one for his Egyptian wife.

The king would sit on the throne to pass judgement when applications for such were made before him: <<A king who sits on the throne of judgement winnows all evil with his eyes>> (Proverbs 20:8).

⁹ All these were made of costly stones, cut according to measure, sawed with saws, back and front, from the foundation to the coping, and from outside to the great court. ¹⁰ The foundation was of costly stones, huge stones, stones of eight and ten cubits. ¹¹ There were costly stones above, cut to measure, and cedar wood. ¹² The great court had three courses of dressed stone to one layer of cedar beams all round; so had the inner court of the house of the Lord, and the vestibule of the house.

1 Kings 7:9-12

The great court had three courses of dressed stone to one layer of cedar beams all round; so had the inner court of the house of the Lord, and the vestibule of the house. At the end of the detailed, magnificent description of Solomon's palace, the writer also mentioned that some of the great architectural features of the palace were also used in the temple. This leaves the reader with the impression that, as great as the temple was, the Solomon's palace was better.

When travelling throughout Europe today, the tourist often comes to magnificent cathedrals. These amazing buildings were mostly built hundreds of years ago at great labour and cost to poor people who could never dream of living in such spectacular places or, in some cases, even worshipping in them. When their most magnificent buildings were churches, it said something about their values. When Solomon made his palace more spectacular than the temple, it said something about his values. The most magnificent buildings in the modern world, which are usually given over to business, shopping, or entertainment, say something about human values today.

The prophet speaks powerfully to those who think more about their house than they do the house of God: <<Then the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Is it a time for you yourselves to live in your panelled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider how you have fared. Go up to the hills and bring wood and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honoured, says the Lord. You have looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says the Lord of hosts. Because my house lies in ruins, while all of you hurry off to your own houses. Therefore the heavens above you have withheld the dew, and the earth has withheld its produce>> (Haggai 1:3-10).

I.f.iv 1 Kings 7:13-51 - Products of Hiram the Bronzeworker

The remainder of the chapter sees the final completion of the temple. Most of the detail involves all the bronze work including decorations, sculptures and large bronze basins. The section concludes with details of the silver and gold items that are made for the altar and those dedicated by David.

¹³ Now King Solomon invited and received Hiram from Tyre. ¹⁴ He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, whose father, a man of Tyre, had been an artisan in bronze; he was full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working bronze. He came to King Solomon, and did all his work.

1 Kings 7:13-14

Solomon sent and received Hiram from Tyre. After the important digression of vv.1-12, the author returns to the temple to describe how that project was completed. This Hiram who makes the temple furnishings fashioned from bronze is not to be confused with the King of Tyre in Chapter 5. Although he is summoned from Tyre, the authors are in fact most careful to point out that it was only his father, from whom he had learned his trade, who is a native of that city. His mother was an Israelite widow of the tribe of Naphtali in the far north of the country, near the Phoenician coast. Therefore, Hiram, who had one Jewish parent, was not simply a Gentile with no Israelite roots. He is described in a way reminiscent of a famous Israelite with a similar job to do, Bezalel son of Uri, the chief craftsman involved in the construction of the tabernacle; refer to Exodus 31:1-11 and 35:30-35. Both men are said to be full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge in working bronze.

¹⁵ He cast two pillars of bronze. Eighteen cubits was the height of one, and a cord of twelve cubits would encircle it; the second pillar was the same. ¹⁶ He also made two capitals of cast bronze, to set on the tops of the pillars; the height of one capital was five cubits, and the height of the other capital was five cubits. ¹⁷ There were nets of chequer-work with wreaths of chain-work for the capitals on the tops of the pillars; seven for one capital, and seven for the other capital. ¹⁸ He made the columns with two rows round each lattice-work to cover the capitals that were above the pomegranates; he did the same with the other capital. ¹⁹ Now the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars in the vestibule were of lily-work, four cubits high. ²⁰ The capitals were on the two pillars and also above the rounded projection that was beside the lattice-work; there were two hundred pomegranates in rows all round; and so with the other capital. ²¹ He set up the pillars at the vestibule of the temple; he set up the pillar on the south and called it Jachin; and he set up the pillar on the north and called it Boaz. ²² On the tops of the pillars was lily-work. Thus the work of the pillars was finished.

1 Kings 7:15-22

He cast two pillars of bronze. Two massive pillars, called Jachin and Boaz, were positioned at the temple entrance, and along with their capitals stood 27 cubits, i.e. 40 feet or 12m, almost as high as the temple itself which was 30 cubits high according to 1 Kings 6:2. They may have been freestanding, although some temples from the ancient world had pillars supporting the roof of the porch. The pillars probably had double capitals: one with lattice-work, five cubits, that is 7.5 feet or 2.3m high: <<*In front of the house he made two pillars thirty-five cubits high, with a capital of five cubits on the top of each*>> (2 Chronicles 3:15), and: <<*Upon it was a capital of bronze; the height of the capital was five cubits; lattice-work and pomegranates, all of bronze, encircled the top of the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with pomegranates*>> (Jeremiah 52:22); and the other with lily-work, four cubits, i.e. 6 feet or 1.8m high. When the temple was destroyed in 2 Kings 25:17, however, there seems to have been only one 3-cubit (4.5-foot/1.4-m) capital of latticework, possibly from the renovations under Jehoshaphat in 2 Kings 12:6-16 or Josiah in 2 Kings 22:3-7.

The destruction of the temple saw the removal of the bronze: <<*The pillars of bronze that were in the house of the Lord, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the Lord, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried*>>

all the bronze to Babylon>> (Jeremiah 52:17). This would have then been recast for their own purposes and all such artistic work lost for all time.

The one on the right was given the name Jachin, meaning ‘he shall establish,’ and the one on the left the name Boaz, meaning ‘in strength.’ One could say that the house of God itself was Jachin and Boaz. That temple was established by God, and built in the strength of God. Every time they looked at that temple, they knew that God liked to establish and strengthen things.

In practical terms the pillars were to be an ever-present reminder to each successive king of the fact that he was ruling by God’s appointment and by his grace, and that in God lay his strength. Believers today ought also to be ever mindful of God’s grace in their lives and of their utter dependence on him.

Some believe that the pillars were meant to remind Israel of the twin pillars from the Exodus. The pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day were constant reminders of the presence of God in the wilderness; refer to Exodus 13:21-22.

Every time someone came to the house of the Lord in the days of Solomon they said, “Look! There is ‘He Shall Establish’. And there is ‘In Him Is Strength.’” It set them in the right frame of mind to worship the Lord. When the crowds gathered at the morning and evening sacrifice to worship the Lord, the Levites led the people standing in front of the temple with these two great, bronze pillars behind them. It was always before them: ‘He Shall Establish and In Him Is Strength.’

The house of God was a place where people experienced what the pillars were all about. At that house, people were established in their relationship with God. At that house, people were given strength from the Lord. From this building, it should go out to the whole community: ‘Come here and get established. Come here and receive the strength of God.’

²³ Then he made the cast sea; it was round, ten cubits from brim to brim, and five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely. ²⁴ Under its brim were panels all round it, each of ten cubits, surrounding the sea; there were two rows of panels, cast when it was cast. ²⁵ It stood on twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east; the sea was set on them. The hindquarters of each were towards the inside. ²⁶ Its thickness was a handbreadth; its brim was made like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held two thousand baths.

1 Kings 7:23-26

Then he made the cast sea. The sea of cast metal was a large metal basin designed to contain water, representing the forces of chaos subdued and brought to order by the Lord, who is Creator of the world; refer to Genesis 1:1-2:3, and Psalms 74:12-17, 89:5-12, and 93:1-5. It was a large, circular water tank, located outside the southeast corner of the temple according to 2 Chronicles 4:10, and used by the priests for their ceremonial cleansing before they entered the temple: <<*The sea was for the priests to wash in*>> (2 Chronicles 4:6b). It corresponded to the bronze basin that had stood between the entrance to the tabernacle and the Mosaic altar; refer to Exodus 30:18-21.

It was round, ten cubits from brim to, and five cubits high. A line of thirty cubits would encircle it completely. The simplest explanation for these figures is that they are given in whole numbers, and are accurate to the degree of detail implied in such numbers. The authors were not trying to give a precise equivalent for pi (π), which for the ten-cubit diameter would yield a circumference of 31.46 cubits, or less if the diameter was a bit less than 10 cubits.

The sea was used by priests for cleansing their hands and feet and perhaps also to supply water to the standing basins for the rinsing of offerings. The volume of the Sea was 2,000 baths, generally calculated to be about 9,575 gallons or 43,500 litres.

It stood on twelve oxen. These probably signified the tribes of Israel, especially as they were encamped around the four sides of the tabernacle in the wilderness; refer to Numbers 2:1-31. A tiny ivory bull used to support a dish or tray on its top was found at Nimrud in Assyria. It may have been an object of trade from Syria, and it was manufactured there in the 8th Century BC. It is reminiscent of the sea of cast bronze that sat on twelve monumental bronze oxen described here.

It held two thousand baths. Second Chronicles 4:5 reads 'three thousand baths.' The difference may be due to a copyist's error.

²⁷ He also made the ten stands of bronze; each stand was four cubits long, four cubits wide, and three cubits high. ²⁸ This was the construction of the stands: they had borders; the borders were within the frames; ²⁹ on the borders that were set in the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. On the frames, both above and below the lions and oxen, there were wreaths of bevelled work. ³⁰ Each stand had four bronze wheels and axles of bronze; at the four corners were supports for a basin. The supports were cast with wreaths at the side of each.

³¹ Its opening was within the crown whose height was one cubit; its opening was round, as a pedestal is made; it was a cubit and a half

wide. At its opening there were carvings; its borders were four-sided, not round. ³² The four wheels were underneath the borders; the axles of the wheels were in the stands; and the height of a wheel was a cubit and a half. ³³ The wheels were made like a chariot wheel; their axles, their rims, their spokes, and their hubs were all cast. ³⁴ There were four supports at the four corners of each stand; the supports were of one piece with the stands. ³⁵ On the top of the stand there was a round band half a cubit high; on the top of the stand, its stays and its borders were of one piece with it. ³⁶ On the surfaces of its stays and on its borders he carved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, where each had space, with wreaths all round. ³⁷ In this way he made the ten stands; all of them were cast alike, with the same size and the same form.

1 Kings 7:27-37

Associated with the sea are ten stands of bronze, decorated with lions, oxen, and cherubim, each designed to hold a basin smaller than the sea.

³⁸ He made ten basins of bronze; each basin held forty baths, each basin measured four cubits; there was a basin for each of the ten stands. ³⁹ He set five of the stands on the south side of the house, and five on the north side of the house; he set the sea on the south-east corner of the house.

1 Kings 7:38-39



Bronze Basins and Stands

In the temple courtyard there were ten bronze wheeled stands that held ten basins filled with water – five on the south side of the temple, five on the north side, similar to the illustration above. They were used to rinse off the animal parts that were used for the burnt-offerings. Each stand was 6 feet or 1.8m long and wide, and 4.5 feet or 1.4m high. Each basin was 4.5 feet or 1.4m in diameter and held 200 gallons or 910 litres of water.

⁴⁰ Hiram also made the pots, the shovels, and the basins. So Hiram finished all the work that he did for King Solomon on the house of the Lord: ⁴¹ the two pillars, the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars, the two lattice-works to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the tops of the pillars; ⁴² the four hundred pomegranates for the two lattice-works, two rows of pomegranates for each lattice-work, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars; ⁴³ the ten stands, the ten basins on the stands; ⁴⁴ the one sea, and the twelve oxen underneath the sea.

1 Kings 7:40-44

The basins of v.40 are not those of vv.38-39, but different utensils used in cleaning out the altar, just as they were for the tabernacle altar: <<*You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze*>> (Exodus 27:3); the pots and shovels would also have been used for this purpose.

⁴⁵ The pots, the shovels, and the basins, all these vessels that Hiram made for King Solomon for the house of the Lord were of burnished bronze. ⁴⁶ In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan. ⁴⁷ Solomon left all the vessels unweighed, because there were so many of them; the weight of the bronze was not determined.

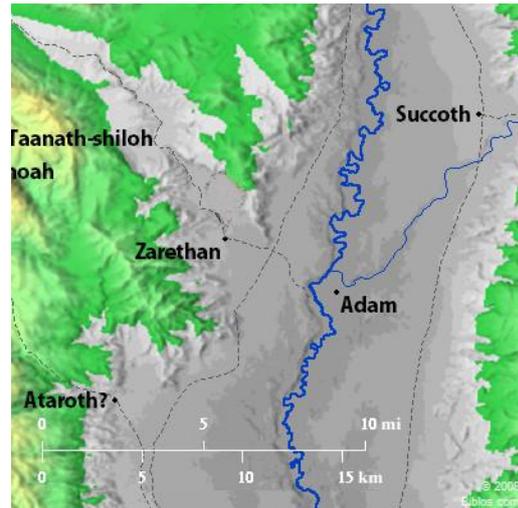
1 Kings 7:45-47

The pots, the shovels, and the basins, all these vessels that Hiram made for King Solomon for the house of the Lord were of burnished bronze. These items were to be used daily in the function of temple offerings and worship and yet they would have gleamed like gold ornaments.

In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan. The author offers no explanation for this or why this particular region was chosen. It was some distance away to the northeast of Jerusalem.

Zarethan is supposed to have been situated in the tribe of Manasseh, west of Jordan, near Jezreel and Bethshan of Scythopolis, and not far from the Jordan. Succoth is known to have been situated east of Jordan, in the tribe of Gad. Refer to the map.

The weight of the bronze was not determined. So much metal was used in the creation of all the bronze articles in the temple that it was not even accounted for. The cost of building the temple of the Lord was incalculable.



⁴⁸ So Solomon made all the vessels that were in the house of the Lord: the golden altar, the golden table for the bread of the Presence, ⁴⁹ the lampstands of pure gold, five on the south side and five on the north, in front of the inner sanctuary; the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs, of gold; ⁵⁰ the cups, snuffers, basins, dishes for incense, and firepans, of pure gold; the sockets for the doors of the innermost part of the house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the nave of the temple, of gold.

1 Kings 7:48-50

Solomon made all the vessels. Hiram takes responsibility only for the work in bronze, while Solomon has charge of the work in gold. Hiram may himself have been <<*full of skill, intelligence, and knowledge*>> (v.14) and a worthy successor, to some extent, to Bezalel; but the authors are eager to portray Solomon as the one who pre-eminently embodies these qualities; refer to 1 Kings 3:4-15 and 4:29. These items would later be removed and taken to Babylon: <<*He carried off all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house; he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the Lord, which King Solomon of Israel had made, all this as the Lord had foretold*>> (2 Kings 24:13). Ultimately, though, God would have his revenge: <<*You have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven! The vessels of his temple have been brought in before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them. You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know; but the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways, you have not honoured*>> (Daniel 5:23). Thus prophecy was fulfilled: <<*For thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the pillars, the sea, the stands, and the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon did not take away when he took into exile from*

Jerusalem to Babylon King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem – thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels left in the house of the Lord, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem: They shall be carried to Babylon, and there they shall stay, until the day when I give attention to them, says the Lord. Then I will bring them up and restore them to this place>> (Jeremiah 27:19-22).

The golden altar. The bronze altar that was made by Hiram was for the purpose of offering sacrifices. This golden altar was placed inside the most holy place and was to be used by the high priest to burn incense to the Lord: <<*Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail>> (Hebrews 9:3-5).*

The golden table for the bread of the Presence. 2 Chronicles 4:8 says there were ten tables of showbread. Here they are described collectively as a unit. The table is one of three items in the Holy Place; like all the items, its pieces are to be either overlaid with gold or made of it. The bread of the Presence consisted of twelve flat loaves of bread, symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel. Facing the lampstand, they enjoyed the perpetual light of divine blessing.



The Table for the Bread of the Presence

The wooden table, overlaid with pure gold, was 3 feet long, 1.5 feet wide and 2.25 feet high or 1 m x 0.5 m x 0.7 m. It held the twelve loaves of the bread of the Presence, which were holy. Wooden poles, overlaid with gold, were inserted through the rings of the table when the table was transported.

The bread of the Presence refers to twelve loaves of unleavened bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, which were baked fresh each week and placed in the Holy Place as an offering to God. The old bread was removed and was only to be eaten by the priests, although King David did famously and controversially request the bread in a time of special need, something Jesus taught as being appropriate: *<<And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath>> (Mark 2:25-27), thus providing insight as to how the law was in fact a gracious gift of God and not a restrictive practice or rite.*

⁵¹ Thus all the work that King Solomon did on the house of the Lord was finished. Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated, the silver, the gold, and the vessels, and stored them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord.

1 Kings 7:51

Solomon brought in the things that his father David had dedicated. God told David that he could not build the temple, but David still collected furnishings and treasures for the temple that his son Solomon would build: *<<Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him and to congratulate him because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him. Now Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold, and bronze; these also King David dedicated to the Lord, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of King Hadadezer son of Rehob of Zobah>> (2 Samuel 8:10-12); refer also to 1 Chronicles Chapter 29.*

And stored them in the treasuries of the house of the Lord. All these great works of art and articles of great value were placed in the temple. This included the ten carts and the shovels, bowls and other needed utensils for sacrifices.